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# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS

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## ETHICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.<sup>1</sup>

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**I**S THERE, can there be, any ethics of international relations? Or must we recognize that as regards actual conditions, ethical theories are as hopelessly in conflict as warring nations, and that as regards the future, the best that ethics can offer is a choice between radically different views of human responsibilities, standards, and values?

Such conflict seems to deny the basal presuppositions of ethics. If there can be no genuine moral principle that does not hold good for all rational beings, if consequences of happiness or well being for all rationals must be reckoned with, if good and bad are properties of things independent of opinion, or if good is the transcendent and eternal—on any of these ethical theories right and good should not be determined by national frontiers. Yet apart from re-creminations as to specific acts which seem to one antagonist either intrinsically good or else entirely justifiable as means, whereas to the other they appear so utterly abhorrent as to condemn any end which incorporates them, there are no doubt fundamental differences in moral attitude. As in the historic battles between national religions, or as with such issues as split Loyalist and Puritan in England, North

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<sup>1</sup> This and the two following papers by Professors Hocking and Overstreet opened the Discussion on Ethics and International Relations before the American Philosophical Association at its Princeton meeting December 27-28, 1917. They are published together in accordance with the vote of the Association.  
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and South in our Civil War, great causes are more or less masked under particular occasions; the names under which men fight do not by any means always show what are the real principles which contend for victory.

I propose to outline certain of the more typical of the issues, combining to some extent the two methods of approach: psychological explanation of what is, and consideration of what ought to be. The questions may be conveniently grouped under the heads of responsibility, justice, and ultimate values.

## I.

### CAN NATIONS BE REGARDED AS MORAL AGENTS?

"International conflicts are not so much moral events as they are the clashing of social forces."<sup>2</sup>

"The author seems to be quite unaware that he is being guilty of an unpardonable confusion of thought. All ethical considerations are completely alien to the state, and the state must therefore resolutely keep them at arm's length."<sup>3</sup>

The first of these quotations would suspend ethical prosecutions in war time in view of the disagreements of juries, and substitute the activity of sociology which raises no question of responsibility, but merely traces forces at work.

The second would demur absolutely to any ethical judgments upon states. The private citizen cannot try the government. The state knows neither right nor wrong, justice nor mercy. Whether one view the state as above morality, as *ex-lex*, like the God of certain scholastics, or place it in a distinct compartment—"politics is politics," just as "business is business"—the practical outcome is the same. All ethicists are hereby solemnly suspended from their occupations so far as states are concerned. Let them consider private morals, or the absolute good. But when the state kills or makes alive, covenants or breaks cove-

<sup>2</sup> Professor H. C. Waiten, INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS, March, 1917.

<sup>3</sup> Review by Professor Eulenberg of Leipsic, of Jerusalem's, *Der Krieg im Licht der Socialtheorie*, in *Archiv für Socialwissenschaft u. Socialpolitik*, July, 1916, p. 317.

nants, seizes or defends, the proper attitude for philosophy is "*nicht sich ärgern, nur bewundern.*"

Professor Warren's attention was challenged by the disagreement of moral judgments pronounced not only by the warring nations of Europe, but also by psychologists and philosophers of this country before we entered the war. One of Professor Warren's inferences may be provisionally accepted: "The nations which are brought into conflict by clashing ideals are not governed by the same ethical standards." But are we thereby forced to conclude that there is "no alternative open but to judge it from a wholly non-ethical standpoint"? True enough that most, if not all, civilized nations in the past, and even in the not very remote past, have broken agreements and invaded smaller states, and in this country we know how radically sincere men in North and South differed on the ethics of slavery. All this is in point against certain ethical attitudes which presuppose universal intuitions or inevitable logic, or an absolutely unquestionable scale of values with its possibility for conclusive weighing of consequences. But the important question is, Will the world gain, or shall we as thinkers gain, by abdicating all moral jurisdiction?

The half truth in the contention is that as yet social forces are imperfectly understood and imperfectly controlled. As Professor Dewey said in substance at the twenty-fifth anniversary exercise of the American Psychological Association, one great reason for the ills under which politics and society suffer is that our social sciences have not kept pace with our physical sciences. We have tools of production and weapons of destruction, but not the means for their control in the interest of human welfare.

But two things ought to be said further: First, the forces which issue in individual action are likewise imperfectly understood, and with some men and women, very imperfectly controlled. Yet we pursue a steady policy of holding the individual responsible for acts which cause injury to his fellows. To "shoot up" a continent is an act for which the plea of "social forces" cannot be accepted as a

bar to ethical judgments. If the philosophers hold their peace, the dead must cry out. The jury may stay out long for the evidence; it may find various degrees of murder; but the old verdict of death by the act of God will not satisfy. And in the second place, control over social forces is not entirely lacking. Bismarck did not think so. He informed Crispi as to the methods of guiding public opinion. He himself gave a brilliant example of ability to make public opinion in two countries demand war. Is it to be presumed that both instruction and example have been forgotten or neglected? There is much to indicate that no such logical inconsistency or practical *non sequitur* as praise of his methods and failure to follow them has been committed.

What can we say to the more absolute demurrer of Eulenberg? In its extreme form it refutes itself. For if there is anything essential to the existence of a modern state, it is the loyalty of its citizens; and loyalty in its highest, most enduring form demands ethical approval. When the state consisted of an absolute monarch, or an absolute few, governed solely by greed for power and gain, secure by its resources of armor, or cavalry, or castles, as against the great mass of subject peoples or individuals, no ethical pretense was needed for conquest or plunder. But now the state finds that even for such wars, moral justification is necessary strategy. It must make its wars appear wars of self defense, as Bismarck taught. It still uses the political maxims cited by Kant in his *Essay on Perpetual Peace*, "*fac et excusa*," "*si fecisti, nega*"; but it does make excuses, it does make denials; it may even prepare the way for outrages by fictitious reports of similar outrages on the part of the enemy; it finds it wise to disguise annexation under the camouflage of "self-determination." Now the militarist or Macchiavellian may for a time succeed in playing the shrewd game of gaining ethical support for a non-ethical state; but the philosopher, at least, ought not to be privy to such a logical sleight-of-hand, and the common people are likely to be increasingly suspicious.

It is in a modified form that the theory of no jurisdiction is more plausible. Ethics has a relation to international relations, the theory asserts, but the ethics which applies is not the ethics of individual life; the clash in ethical judgments is due to confusion between standards for the individual and standards for nation or state.<sup>4</sup> If the state is a supreme and transcendent entity; if in it all individual good culminates and all obligation is fulfilled; if it is the embodiment of reason, God on earth, then obviously the safety of the state is the supreme law. How shall mortal man be more just than his maker? So runs the thought of Hegel and essentially of Rümelin. Supplemented by the doctrines that history is the march of God and that the superiority of a given state proves it the representative of reason, the incarnation of the *Idee*, it sufficiently explains why those who hold such a doctrine must clash in judgments with those who do not. The infallible state denies the right of private judgment. Morally, as legally, the state can do no wrong. Englishmen and Americans, Münsterberg explains, are too hedonistic and egoistic in their ethics to apprehend such a superindividual object of loyalty.

It would doubtless be futile for the American to discuss this view if he is incapable of understanding it, but the query must be raised, whether at any rate any concrete particular state as yet fills the specifications of absolute reason. Granting that mankind—when mankind shall have progressed in wisdom, sympathy, and good will—organized for living nobly and well, may claim the loyalty of all men, does this give any particular state the right to trample on human life, pervert truth, poison good faith, and practice ruthless frightfulness under the plea of necessity? I may pass over further discussion of the dangers to human values in an abstract idealistic deification of the state, as they have been so admirably set forth in Professor Dewey's *German Philosophy and Politics*.

But a more downright and plausible form of removing

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<sup>4</sup> Lord Lytton's Glasgow address, 1888.

nations from moral control while seeming to maintain an ethical standard is that of Treitschke. Starting plausibly with a maxim of Kant, it ends with complete justification for *Machtpolitik*—the politics of Power. The state is a collective personality. Every personality must be treated as an end, not as a means only. Man and every personality “attains the highest perfection possible when he has developed the most essential part of himself. When we apply this standard to the state and remember that its very personality is power, we see its highest moral duty is to uphold that power . . . the injunction to assert itself remains always absolute. Weakness must always be condemned as the most disastrous and despicable of crimes, the unforgivable sin of politics.”<sup>5</sup>

If we admit this absolute right of self assertion, no other justification for any act by the state is pertinent. The measure of ruthlessness is solely its success in increasing or maintaining power. The only refutation it can admit is failure. If other persons are not in sympathy with this idea, then their resentment may turn strength into weakness and thus prove the immorality of a specific act of ruthlessness. Likewise for a state to conquer what it cannot assimilate is immoral, for it displays weakness.

International law faces the doctrine in the following form: Aside from those provisions based upon treaties, there are other provisions which are in the nature of usages initiated or practiced by certain states, and accepted or at least tolerated by others. Such was the doctrine of “continuous voyage” put forth by the United States government during the Civil War. The German government desires to introduce a doctrine of “war zones.” If we say that international law is anything that a power can carry through with the acquiescence of other powers, the question recurs: Shall other powers allow the power in question to “get away with it” or shall they resist? If it is an absolute duty of power A to assert itself, and an equally absolute

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<sup>5</sup> *Politics*, Vol. 1, p. 94 ff.

duty of power *B* to assert itself, are we not confronted with a contradiction which must at least awaken a doubt as to the absolute morality of power?

On this basis we might have an internal limit of power set by the ability to assimilate diverse elements into one national whole. Just as there is a point at which the superior efficiency of great corporations becomes doubtful, so a world-capturing policy in an empire may develop weakness.

If now proceeding from this absolute duty of self assertion we should attempt to forecast the ethics of international relations, we might at first sight suppose world domination the logical expression of any power strong enough to carry through such an aim—but too complete dominance would mean peace and this would be fatal to another militarist value—war. For Treitschke the logical outcome is, first, pluralism: "The state is power, precisely in order to assert itself against other equally independent powers"—and then war: "The grandeur of history lies in the perpetual conflict of nations." The same view of war as the "best and noblest form of the struggle for existence," in the words of Schmidt, "the main factor in true, genuine *Kultur*" according to Nippold; "A holy thing," "The holiest thing on earth" according to Sombart; is apparently shared by many besides Bernhardt.

It cannot be said that this scheme of power and conflict is absolutely non-ethical. Its scale of values places the heroic at the head, or it considers struggle as nature's, and therefore as man's, highest law.<sup>6</sup> As to the first point of view, I do not see how one can demonstrate by argument the values of other virtues to be superior to those of war. I can only wonder whether those who have actually been close enough to the trenches and the empty homes to take in the full experience of such a war as this, will still regard it as the best life. If so, I fear no arguments from pure reason will have consideration. I can only say in the words

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<sup>6</sup> Compare Professor Vernon Kellogg's account of his conversations with the biologist in "Headquarters Nights," *Atlantic Monthly*, August, 1917.



of Lincoln, "I should think that any one who likes this sort of thing would be very much pleased with it."

As for the second point, that since conflict is nature's law, it should also be man's, I reply that the very essence of ethical life according to pragmatist, idealist and at least one realist, is the possibility of at least partial control by intelligence instead of by trial and error, partial freedom from blind necessity, partial massing of forces against a reluctant cosmos.

One great task of ethics in relation to international relations, is to discover and point out how far intelligent methods of co-operation may supersede conflict as an international process. Münsterberg draws the analogy between war and prevalent methods of industrial competition, and uses it to justify war. But we have learned in the economic world to discriminate between a competition directed toward the conquest of nature which stimulates invention and thereby improves the condition of all, and a competition toward conquest of competitors, which substitutes brutality for ideas and profits only the winner.

Power is indeed by tradition the essence of the state. It was in military operations that the enormous power of human association and organization on a large scale first emerged. Political organizations followed military lines. The cruder processes of violence were at first largely met and controlled by blood and iron. And as a whole, Europe has never been able to co-operate. The colonies in this country nearly fell into the same slough of despond. Fortunately, they decided to co-operate, by trade, canals, railways, migrations, postal service, instead of competing by tariffs and maintaining armies. Economic power, only in the last century exercised on a scale comparable to political power, has been likewise proceeding wastefully, but we are now facing the elemental problem of economic supply of human needs more directly. Shall we go back to the older wasteful process?

I conclude that the doctrine of the state as naked power issues in an ethics of power which doubtless has claimed

admiration, but which when universalized, so to speak, becomes too horrible a thing for most men to tolerate, and which even in its own test of power ignores the greater power of co-operation and good will as compared with conflict. For co-operation and good will never are evoked by power as power.

True it is that state and nation have peculiar tasks, peculiar responsibilities. They have been defenders of liberty and order, arbiters of justice, bonds of unity, preservers of culture, and agencies for common welfare of large groupings of men, though also agencies for strife and tyranny. True likewise that it is difficult for the individual, especially if he be of a different nation, to judge these adequately and fairly. Yet if the world is to remain tolerable for man no single group or organization, whether it call itself "state" or by less pretentious name, can claim exemption from moral responsibility. It is by international responsibility, ecumenical conscience and international guarantees that the great interests, of which nations have in the past been the necessary trustees and defenders, must be increasingly maintained.

## II.

### CONFLICTING STANDARDS OF JUSTICE.

A second issue, more or less clearly emerging between the warring groups, is, What is the standard for justice? Stationary nations, or those which have already obtained what they want, are naturally insistent on the rights of the existing status. Those which are in process of rapid growth, or which have not reached territory adequate for their wants, would use for their measure of justice their need of expansion.

Several aspects of this issue have emerged in the present war. (a) Treaties versus needs of the situation when conditions change. (b) The right to areas of the earth, based on occupancy, or past conquest, as versus claims based on the need of a growing population, or the merits of superior civilization. (c) Established rules for land and

sea warfare, designed to mitigate injury to non-combatants, as versus the changes necessary if a new invention such as the submarine is to be used with a maximum of result.

The question of treaties was well discussed by Mill, who took the ground that no government had the right to bind a people indefinitely. Treaties, he urged, should be for limited periods. It is noteworthy that the principle of the Dartmouth College case has been more and more strictly construed and limited by our courts in the interest of preserving freedom of action on the part of the public. Ethics must, however, distinguish between needs that commend themselves internationally, and needs that are egoistic. If the purpose is aggression, a nation can hardly command international sanction until this aggression is able to prove its claim.

The question of the right to occupy or control areas now sparsely occupied, or unimproved, is one that Americans decided in their own case on one basis when dealing with Indians, and on another when dealing with individual land ownership. Broadly speaking, the right of the whites to the territory controlled by the United States rests less on any treaties with the Indians than on the fact that under the civilization of the whites the land supports a hundred millions and may support many more, whereas under the Indian, and even Spanish control, it was far less fruitful. On the one hand, individual Indians ought to have been treated with consideration and humanity; on the other, it can not be said that the collective units, the tribes, ought to be preserved forever in their original status of exclusive occupancy of the whole continent. The case is analogous in part to the introduction of machinery. Individual workers ought not to bear the burden of readjustment, but society cannot refuse to accept inventions on the ground that some men will lose their employment in tasks for which they have acquired special skill.

Applying this principle to international affairs, and beginning with an extreme case, no small group of men can equitably possess or control indefinitely a great area, if it

is thereby kept from contributing to human well being. But as civilization advances attachment to the soil increases, and the web of human relations grows stronger and more intricate. The case of actual occupants becomes stronger before the test of satisfying human needs, as well as in sentiment and legal title. Just here exchange of goods without surrender of soil has provided a solution. Just as it is no longer necessary to own an Epictetus in order to read his book, or to be lord over a villein in order to get the aid of the tiller of the soil, so it is increasingly unnecessary for a nation to own mines or forests or soil in order to obtain heat and metal, wool and wheat. This principle, however, must be carried farther. We have heard chiefly of an international court. My colleague, Dean Hall, urges that it is equally important and probably more important to set up an international legislature which shall have power to provide on the one hand for access to raw materials or such exchange as may secure them, and on the other, for suitable markets. Servia ought to have had more than one market. Germany makes splendid uses of iron; she ought to have iron without going about to get it by conquest. It is easy to see difficulties. Shall France be required by an international legislature to furnish iron wherewith Essen may forge weapons for the conquest of France? On the other hand, can such an international legislature prevent Germany from using the iron as it pleases when once it is in possession of it? Yet who can doubt that the path of progress must lie along the direction of providing for all legitimate needs by other than the crude method of ownership of men or dominion over the earth?

The most difficult obstacle in the way of a non-political method of providing for needs is the seeming diminution of political prestige. Will it answer to let England govern a district while Germany has the trade, or vice versa? Such was often the situation before the war. We get on harmoniously with Canada on this basis, yet the appeal to political interests when the reciprocity treaty was under consideration and the overturn of the Canadian govern-

ment on this issue shows how easily such a question becomes delicate.

### III.

#### ULTIMATE VALUES—ARISTOCRACY VS. DEMOCRACY.

The third great issue which divides the contending groups is that of aristocracy versus democracy as a political and social order. Not that all the inhabitants of the Central Powers are Junkers, not that all British, French, and Americans are democratic in ideals and sympathies. But the dominating agencies in the first group, from the Hohenzollerns who have refused power offered by popular voice in order to hold it more securely when achieved by blood and iron, to their ecclesiastical and academic supporters, believe in direction by the few, discipline for the many. They maintain or accept the militarist scheme of subordination of civil to military power. The dominating forces in the opposing group are increasingly democratic and have no disposition to allow military forces the decisive word in national policy.

The psychology of Germany has been acutely analyzed by Veblen in his "Nature of Peace," as that of a feudal state. The religious ideas which come to us in such phrases as "the German God," or in the recent language of the emperor, "The year 1917 with its great battles has proved that the German people has in the Lord of Creation above an unconditional and avowed ally on whom it can absolutely rely," belong naturally with the feudal stage of society. A feudal morality finds in loyalty to a superior complete satisfaction and sufficient ethical sanction for any act. Bismarck's morals seem to have been of this sort, although sometimes in Prussia's interest he might resist the monarch. And on its other side, feudal morality is the *Herrenmoral* of a ruling class. It is not necessary to charge Nietzsche with bringing on the war, but he certainly thought he was advocating (1) a *Herrenmoral*, and (2) a morality the reverse of the general morality of Christendom. A class which believes in its divine right to govern will naturally find such a morality of masters convenient. And if a people believes

its own culture so superior to that of other peoples as to make international law impossible,<sup>7</sup> it will easily accept so much of superior class morality as to make explicable collisions with codes of inferior cultures.

But let us look away from historic reasons why men are so, and consider in barest outline some of the values claimed for aristocracy and democracy respectively.

If we are to have increasing unity, increasing organization, shall it be along the line of superior-inferior class rule, that is, of empire, or along the line of self direction and equality? When I call this a question of ultimate values, I do not mean that none of the values have any common denominator, but that although some have, others apparently have not. Let us notice some of the issues which are arguable. They turn largely on whether we stake our case on what is, or on what may be, on nature or on intelligence, on mechanism or on consciousness.

(1) There is first the question of efficiency. This is based in part on specialization of function. If men are in fact different in both kind and degree of ability, is it not obvious that some should rule and others be ruled? From Plato and Aristotle to the present day, this has seemed to many axiomatic. A second closely related argument is, that democracy will refuse to use experts. It is a "cult of incompetence," as Faguet puts it. A representative of a group is chosen by the group, and therefore is below the level of the group who choose him; he sits in a group and therefore when in parliament sinks below his own level—such is the social psychology of Christensen.

The democrat replies: Admitting there are differences between men, the great question is, do we propose to *crystallize* these or to encourage the emergence of new powers? A class system takes the first course. Its machinery, social, political, educational, is all based on the theory that nature has said the last word. Democracy believes in experimenting with human nature, in taking chances, that

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<sup>7</sup> Kohler declares English, French, Russians, Italians, and Americans as impossible members of any international law association. They have no "living conscience."

new powers may unfold. While it relies mainly on bringing on the whole mass, it sometimes finds genius coming out of Nazareth. It admits a good deal of lost motion, but it is willing to pay the price.

And as to the cult of incompetence, democracy urges that this is a relic of the time when office meant dominance. No one objects to the expert surgeon or the competent musician. Undoubtedly the legislator or judge or executive must have authority as well as expertness, but with a genuinely democratic conception of government it is at least plausible that suspicion of the expert as official may decrease. Early democracy in America, fresh from the recollection of old world governments, was actuated by fear of governmental usurpation of power. Its system of checks and balances was intended as Professor McLaughlin has put it, to provide a government that could not "do things." Now that we demand increasingly for our complex conditions a government that *can* do things, the need of the expert is increasingly apparent. There is likely to be less suspicion of his ability.

(2) Aristocracy claims that specialization of function not only means efficiency, but also individual liberty and culture. It asserts that liberty and democracy are inherently contradictory. It will have naught of the herd, of the mish-mash and its control. There is undoubtedly an individuality of the aristocratic type. It seeks intellectual, æsthetic, or economic distinction. And in past ages with inadequate production very likely culture could flourish only by building upon the submerged foundations of slaves, villeins, artisans, or some other exploited class. In the language of Nietzsche, "we children of the future . . . ponder over the need of a new order of things, even of a new slavery—for every strengthening and elevation of the type 'man' also involves a new form of slavery."

But is not this merely another illustration of the disposition of the aristocratic theory to fall back upon what has been, upon nature as versus creative intelligence? It is by no means certain that individuality requires class aris-

tocracy. There is certainly in intellectual development as such, no necessary dependence upon comparative superiority. If there is an aristocratic art which expresses rare and unique experiences of a few gifted souls, there is certainly also a democratic art which sounds chords of common emotion. If there is a type of individuality which increases its values by being different from others, there is another which seeks them through contacts, and defines its own ideals by comparison with those of equals, as Professor Fite has well pointed out.

(3) We come finally to a comparison in which there is no apparent common denominator. The final issue between aristocracy and democracy is the relative value of power over another, as compared with free association among equals. I do not see that the partisan of aristocracy can demonstrate his case to the advocate of democracy, or vice versa. There can be no question of the reality and urge of the will to power. There is little doubt that to many natures the consciousness of power over other human beings is more satisfying even than that of power over nature. This consciousness of power is enormously increased by membership in a military or other ruling class. A *Herrenmoral* will seem to such a class the expression of the eternal fitness of things. "To demand of strength that it should *not* manifest itself as strength,—that it should *not* be a will for overcoming, for overthrowing, for mastery, a thirst for enemies, for struggles and triumphs, is as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should manifest itself as strength."

The democrat, however, on his side urges that equality is satisfying to those who live it. Friendship is good, and friendship rests on equality. The religious ideal of equality before God, the implication of equality before the law, the give and take of scholarship in pursuit of truth bespeak a democratic value that is real. It is the appeal of the finer institutions which man is building; it is more and more gaining ground.

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